

Social Media Application and Policy Development

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Abstract

Social media has become a prevalent form of communication in today's society and an imbedded part of our culture. Many organizations whether public or private, have realized it is important to develop policy or guidelines to help regulate items posted whether it is comments, opinions, public education messages, event notices, photos, video, or other content. The problem is the City of Westminster Fire Department does not have a policy in place outlining the use of social media. The purpose of this research is to develop recommendations for a policy that identify the appropriate use of technology and its application regarding social media. Descriptive research was utilized to discuss the following questions:

1. What are the suitable motives to use social media?
2. How should information be posted on social media sites and how should it be regulated?
3. What is the appropriate posting of information on social media sites?
4. How should policies be developed to regulate social media use and what items should be included?

The procedures utilized incorporated extensive literature review, policy review of public and private entities, and a questionnaire filled out by department employees. The results demonstrated a policy needs to be developed to protect the organization and offer guidance for employee interaction when representing the department. It is recommended the Westminster Fire Department pursue active participation in various social media aspects and develop a standard operating guideline to define its use, content posting, who will monitor the sites, and how to enhance community outreach through this medium.

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Social Media has become a form of communication that is at the forefront of United States (U.S.) American culture and around the world. In today's society, news has become obtainable as it happens, populations are united through single websites, social networks are formed, and people demand access to events as they unfold. In the fire service, the employee groups have discovered this is an effective way to communicate as an individual, department and organization. Capturing the boundaries of utilizing social media has become an obstacle and policies must be developed to guide the employee group. Technology for disseminating information has vastly increased with mobile smart phones, tablets, and convenient access to the Internet. The fire service has experienced several incidents that have damaged the reputation of the fire service. It was discovered social media policies were not in place and boundaries need to be set in each department. The problem is the City of Westminster Fire Department (WFD) does not have a policy in place outlining the use of social media. The purpose of this research is to develop recommendations for a policy that identify the appropriate use of technology and its application regarding social media. Descriptive research was utilized to discuss the following questions:

1. What are the suitable motives to use social media?
2. How should information be posted on social media sites and how should it be regulated?
3. What is the appropriate posting of information on social media sites?
4. How should policies be developed to regulate social media use and what items should be included?

Background and Significance

The WFD is a fire department that consists of 135.5 personnel that serve the City of Westminster (<http://www.ci.westminster.co.us/>). Westminster is a north suburb of Denver, has a

population of 106,000, has two major highways that run through and along the borders, an active rail line, has significant retail, and has over 3,000 businesses (<http://www.ci.westminster.co.us/>). To meet the community needs on a daily basis; a maximum of thirty-nine personnel staff thirteen pieces of apparatus housed out of six strategically located fire stations. 117 on-line personnel make up three platoons, or shifts, to cover the staffing needs. The additional 18.5 employees serve in an administrative capacity. The demographics of Westminster cover a large Caucasian population with sizeable Hmong and Hispanic populations. Other ethnic groups are also represented. The businesses that are in the City are high tech, retail, light industry, and significant office buildings. The call volume for service exceeds 8,200 calls on an annual basis. The types of calls of service are varied – fire, emergency medical services (EMS), hazardous materials, water and technical rescue, and other miscellaneous emergencies (<http://www.ci.westminster.co.us/>).

The fire employees on the apparatus have cell phones and have open access to the Internet at the fire stations. The City has opened the Internet with minimal firewall protection to allow the employees to access their electronic mail (e-mail), browse the Internet for professional and training purposes, and to visit social media sites in that they belong. The City recognizes the unique work schedule and those twenty-four hours is a long time to be away from home or out of communication. Many of the staff utilizes these forms of communication to speak with friends, family, and co-workers. With open access, the accountability has been placed with the supervisors and employees in that they would adhere to administrative memos regarding Internet use (B. McFall, personal communication, May 24, 2011). The current electronic media access policy gives directives to the type of Internet sites to stay away from but does not discuss the use of social media (B. McFall, personal communication, January 4, 2010).

There are a large number of fire employees who respond on the vast emergent and non-emergent calls. With most employees having cell phones with camera capabilities or helmet cameras, many have taken liberty to take photos or videos on an emergency scene. Pictures have surfaced on Facebook from calls in Westminster and fortunately they have not been determined to be inappropriate, violating a person's privacy, or violating Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA). There are severe legal ramifications that can occur without proper guidance in that a citizen's privacy could be compromised. In addition, the WFD could be found in violation of Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG) or acting in manner that is deemed inappropriate by the public. These scenarios open the city to legal issues and lawsuits can stem from a lack of accountability and policy.

It is clear trend in the WFD is evolving and the various facets of social media use need to be researched, discussed and addressed. While working within the Executive Development concept, this is an opportunity to facilitate a team to discuss the research findings. This team can develop and integrate change as deemed necessary by recommendations and help lead the departments into the future use of effective social media. It will also help fulfill a goal of the United States Fire Administration (USFA) by improving the fire and emergency services' professional status.

Literature Review

Social media has become a progressive form of communication and a staple in the U.S. culture. It manifests itself in many forms and it is being updated on a continual basis. In order to discuss social media it must first be defined. Ball State University (2009) defines social media as, "...media designed to be disseminated through social interaction, created using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques" (para. 2). In another definition, Stowe Boyd

(2007) states, “Social Media describes the online tools that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, perspectives and media itself, thus facilitating conversations and interaction online between groups of people. These tools include blogs, message boards, podcasts, networks, communities, and vlogs” (para. 11). These two definitions state it is social interaction that makes this form of communication successful. Several examples of social media are Wikipedia (reference), FaceBook (social networking), Twitter (presence apps), YouTube (video sharing), Second Life (virtual reality), Upcoming (events), Digg (news aggregation), Flickr (photo sharing), and BlogTv. Today’s society wants their information in real-time, feel connected and social media has become the tool to allow it to happen (Rogers, 2010).

Social media is a form of communication that started in the 1950’s when it was discovered that telephone networks could be breached and free calls could be made. Early social media sites were boxes that could emulate tones and therefore allowed, “phone phreaks” to host virtual seminars and discussions (Borders, 2009). As technology progressed, “blogs” and “podcasts” took place on hacked corporate voice mail systems. With personal computers becoming available to the mainstream, sites such as America On-Line and CompuServe were developed for the masses but were expensive to use. The World Wide Web (WWW) became active on August 6th, 1991 that would change the information highway forever (Borders, 2009). In 1997, Sixdegrees.com was the first site developed that had a viral element and opened the door for modern day social media. Members were allowed to connect to each other and others could see the formed relationship and join them to build their own network (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). This form of web site became known as Web 2.0 that allowed any user to log in, develop a profile, connect with friends, create a network, create a Web site, and update it any time they wanted (Mackay, 2010). This launched sites such as FaceBook and Twitter that have

revolutionized the way the country and world communicate with each other and receive their information; people now feel connected. Bill Wren (2010) states the reason for social media is, “Connection. Community. Shared values and beliefs, ideas and debates, groups of people we belong with” (para. 15).

Social networks have been created online to help promote businesses, corporations, government entities, personal communication, to help with politicians to win elections, and many other miscellaneous uses. Since sites have become popular with most people who have a computer and smart phone, there has been an adjustment period of just how this media should be used. David Rogers (2009) has developed a five-step plan to help businesses realize what a customer is looking for on a social media site:

1. Customers in networks seek to freely access digital data, content, and interactions as quickly, easily, and flexibly as possible.
2. Customers seek to engage with digital content that is sensory, interactive, and relevant to their needs.
3. Customers seek to customize their experiences by choosing and modifying a wide assortment of information.
4. Customers seek to connect with one another by sharing their ideas and opinions in text, images, and video.
5. Customers seek to collaborate projects and goals through platforms.

David Rogers (2009) goes on to say, “It has always been one-on-one communication. Media progressed to one-to-many communication with the advent of newspapers and television. Social media has made it many-to-many communication” (p. 41).

With this concept, a private or public organization need to be aware of what the message is they hope to convey. April Joyner (2010) has advice to offer to her readers who are looking to establish their FaceBook page or other forms of social media:

- Demonstrate what your company does
- Be careful what you say about others – lawsuit are a potential
- Help employees bond – let them contribute – collaborate
- Interact with your customers – really. This will kill a site and people lose interest
- Build a community
- Let customers contribute
- Connect with potential partners

Lisa Barone (2009) helps companies develop their own social media plan. It is important to know who you are as a company and why you want to become involved in social media. Time must be taken to develop a plan of what the company hopes to accomplish by opening a Web site or FaceBook page. When this door is opened, rules of engagement must be put in place to help employees respond to negative postings or what is proper for them to post as an individual.

David Rogers (2009) stated it best, “We are the network and the network is us” (p.4).

The use of social media and the instant access, immediate updates, and mass messaging came to light during the 2008 Presidential Campaign. President Obama’s team realized the potential for the various forms of social media and knew the younger generations were in tune with using these mediums. A plan was put together; it became dynamic as the campaign progressed, to reach out to millions of voters. President Obama successfully used these sites as a vehicle for generating excitement among a diverse and vast on-line community (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). Obama’s team realized how these sites could interconnect millions of voters and

allowed them to, “. . . articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections ad those made by others within the system”

(Baumgartner & Morris, 2010, p. 52). Obama’s team was successful by developing 80,000 friends on MySpace and 2.4 million supporters on FaceBook. President Obama is known as the first Internet President (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010).

Social media sites on the Internet have grown and have become diverse in their use from posting opinions, blogs, pictures, or video. The iPhone, BlackBerrys, and other smart phones have made it easy to keep these sites up-to-date at a moments notice (Mackay, 2010). People wield these tiny gadgets in their hand and it is a powerful tool. People who work for a fire department are using these tools to capture the destruction on scene; citizens are using them to videotape fire and emergency medical services (EMS) workers in action, and other government employees at work. Cell phones have become a staple in US culture after three decades of development (Mackay, 2010). With these tools in the palm of most employees, there has been discussion on their use while on duty and then posting the information on a web site.

Adding a FaceBook or Twitter page to an agency’s overall web presence can make it feel like the agency is being opened to chaos. Many managers are reluctant as they feel it can open the department up to negative comments, publicity and do not want to embrace the positives it can bring to a community (Reynolds, 2011). Social media will allow you to develop and foster relationships with the community and open the door to hundreds if not thousands of “friends”. Citizens are already talking about services so this is an opportunity to embrace it and engage. There are opportunities to post meeting agendas, community events, and crisis notifications and program highlights. By taking part in conversations, it allows the entity to have some control over the conversation. However, there must be restrictions placed on who has control of the

Web pages, who is allowed to post, and the ability to make quick decisions without approval (Reynolds, 2011).

Twitter and FaceBook have emerged as the most common forms of posting, sending, and receiving information. Many organizations are using them as their communication medium and enhancing their information distribution. According to Dan Knight (2011) in reference to many southern California cities, “ They have taken the bold step of moving completely away from paid advertising and have turned exclusively to social media” (p. 1). Dan Knight (2011) also goes on to say social media levels the playing field as it allows towns of 10,000 compete with a town of 30,000. Many fire and EMS departments have taken to this philosophy and are integrating social media into their operation. Social media has been prevalent in the private sector but not the public organizations (Johnson, 2011). Addressing the use has become a topic of discussion throughout the Nation.

There are many other uses and success stories in utilizing social media within a department. Boston Fire Department has developed an immense fan base with over 14,000 members. 17,000 friends have viewed notices such as reminders to change batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and the department estimates over 50,000 saw the information through connections (McCourt, 2010). Cal Fire has discovered using Skype is a valuable tool to hold a press conference in regards to large events. This eliminated the need for reporters to travel the scene of incidents and quickly disseminated information (Goodman, 2011). In Austin, Texas, a single engine plane crashed into a building that housed the local Internal Revenue Services office. Media outlets first learned of the incident through a passer-by who placed a tweet through Twitter. It was sent to his friends who then sent it to theirs. Austin made international news in quick fashion (DeCrane, 2010).

Many departments are being asked the question, “Do you have a social media policy” (Bressler, 2010, p.1)? It is common practice to believe the social media mediums will benefit the fire service and help them reach out to the public. According to Jeff Bressler (2010) there are some major pitfalls that need to be considered:

- Think like a spokesperson. Social media gives a voice to every firefighter who has a FaceBook page or Twitter account. What limitations need to be placed on the spokesperson?
- Designate Representatives. Decided who will represent the department and place limitations on what they do and do not say. If you give a voice to multiple people, their opinions may differ from the organizations.
- Avoid jargon. Use plain English when speaking to the public.
- Identify off-limit subjects. Decided ahead of time what can be discussed and share that with all members who will have access to social media.
- Open discussion. Solicit suggestion and ideas from all members of the department.

Using guidelines will help create an environment that fosters growth through social media. It is impossible to remove all opinions but communicating the department’s intentions is crucial.

Robert Ambrogi (2009) reminds departments to include not posting anything that’s confidential.

Violating personal privacy or HIPPA laws opens the organization to legal disputes.

When developing policies, Drew Johnson (2011) is concerned people who do not understand or use these communication tools are putting many policies into place. He also suggests managers bring in young responders to help develop policy since they are most familiar with all of their uses. The policies can direct the use of keeping the community up-to-date on road closures, information about weather emergencies, communicate from a scene to another in

the organization regarding an issue, and develop professional and strategic relationships through marketing and communication (McCliggott, 2011). In addition to the positive affects, organizations must be careful to protect their reputation, themselves, and the public. Many people will post something before thinking about the potential impact. Public safety employees are held to a higher standard and must think before they post. EMS and fire members must remember they are public servants; they represent themselves, the community, and organization. Developing guidelines will help ensure a positive reputation stays intact (McCliggott, 2011).

Finally, there are many tips and advice for firefighters who want to use social media for their personal use. Steve Wirth and Doug Wolfberg (2010) offer ten ways to use social media in a safe manner:

1. Don't post inappropriate pictures or images. Employers do not want to see you doing stupid things. Post pictures you would want your parents to see.
2. Don't complain about your job, supervisors, or co-workers in public forum. These negative comments reflect poorly on you, the organization, and the persons you criticize.
3. Don't use inappropriate statuses. Do not use an update that depicts patient care, situations, or department issues.
4. Be particular about your friends and associations. You cannot control what your friends post. It will come through on your wall.
5. Check your privacy and security settings and know their rules.
6. Consider developing a professional profile page.
7. Don't use social networking while engaged in patient care or work activities. Use these sites per agency guidelines but use personal devices.
8. Do not misrepresent yourself or others. Be accurate regarding education and training.

9. Be who you are. Transparency and honesty are the best policies to follow.
10. Respect copyright and fair uses laws. This is for your employers protection as well as your own.

Being cognizant of social media's far reaching dominion, will help guide you when posting comments or opinions. Employees need to understand they represent themselves, community, organization, and department both on and off duty. Establishing a well thought out guideline will help keep a department and person from embarrassing themselves and getting into trouble through social media (Wirth & Wolfberg, 2010).

The information discussed in this literature review help determine the direction an agency should go when entering the world of social media. It is a daunting task to think people will have access to say how they feel and give opinion whether positive or negative in a public forum. The literature review provides insight into reasons to enter social media, how it should be used, limitations that need to be placed, and guidelines for individual use.

Procedures

Several procedures were utilized to help answer the four questions posed for this research. Proper utilization of social media in the Westminster Fire Department (WFD) has not been adequately addressed and discovering its potential use has to be discovered. In addition, positive and negative attributes of entering this arena must be evaluated. With this topic, it is difficult to obtain data, statistics, figures, or other forms of this type of information. In order to answer these questions, a process was developed to adequately provide information to help the WFD develop a plan to implement social media use.

First, research was performed in the fire, government, and business communities to look for policies that were currently in these various organizations. It is critical to review these

documents and look to other agencies that have an effective policy in place. The research began at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland at the learning resources center. Key words such as “social media”, “policy”, “appropriate use”, “government”, and “fire department” were used in conjunction with each other to find literature valuable to this topic. The City of Hampton, Virginia, Orange County, California, Clark County Fire, Nevada, City of Austin, Texas, Intel, and Ball State University were selected for this research. It was apparent these institutions have put thought and effort into their policies and they would be beneficial in developing results for this project.

Second, extensive literature review was performed. Again, key words were used at the City of Westminster Public Library, College Hill Library, and through personal Internet connections. This included researching books on social media, reading through journals related to the fire service and the private business population, Web sites related to both communities, and looking for policy and guidance that has been established in the business and government environment. Social media is not new to the private sector and there is valuable information that will help guide government agencies.

And third, a questionnaire was distributed to ten percent of the Department and a cross section from the various ranks was utilized to give an objective look on how a social media policy or governance would be viewed by the employees. This provided feedback from those who would take pictures, video, or post a blog on social media sites while on or off duty. Two personnel from each rank were chosen – Firefighter, Paramedic, Engineer, Lieutenant, Captain, Chief Officer, and the Department Public Information Officer. Tenure was not a consideration but it varies from a five-year employee to a person with twenty-eight years on the Department.

The procedures used for this study helped answer the four questions, address the problem statement and purpose statement. There is expansive articles on the topic but not related to the fire service. However, it was determined whether government or public, social media affects the organizations the same. The procedures were adequate in fulfilling the intent of this research.

Results

The literature review provided a surplus of information as to companies, businesses, and organizations both in and outside of the government that use social media and/or have developed use policies. This research started as a broad topic to include cell phone use but was quickly determined social media use was in itself a topic that needed to be researched, discussed, and recommendations made to the WFD. Reviewing organizations that had social media policies in place also helped answer the four research questions. The private companies and organizations have been using social media for some time and have experience with policy development. This helped give a broad perspective on social media regulation. The questionnaire provided valuable feedback to look at the impact a policy or other form of regulation would affect the employee work group.

Research Question 1: What are the suitable motives to use social media?

The extensive research uncovered many motives that would benefit a fire department for utilizing social media. Social media has become a viral process that interconnects friends with friends, their friends, and so on. When a person becomes an organizations “friend” on a site such as FaceBook, a link is established with a collective group that in essence has formed their own network (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). By setting up a page on FaceBook, a department has the ability to post such items as special event dates, reminders to change smoke detector batteries, fire prevention messages, public education topics, announcing cardiopulmonary

resuscitation (CPR), road closures, changes within the department, and many other creative items.

Community outreach has become a common theme throughout the fire service and this is another tool to be involved, give and receive feedback, and interact with the population. Few people have direct interaction with a fire agency as it may be during a public event or when they need emergent services. It is important the public understands the depth of the fire department and all of the resources they have to offer. FaceBook or MySpace gives a virtually free platform to convey this information. Boston Fire Department demonstrated they have over 17,000 “friends” and often reach 50,000 people with their message (McCourt, 2010).

Another motive would be to have people follow your organization on a site such as Twitter. Twitter allows a department to give real-time data regarding an incident. The address and nature of a fire can be placed over Twitter and the media can respond appropriately without trying to reach an agency through their busy dispatch center (Respers, 2009). It has also been demonstrated in southern California that Skype is a valuable tool to host a Web media briefing. This allows anyone in the country to log in and receive the valuable information (Goodman, 2011). A department can also place a public service announcement on YouTube. Again, this is a free site that can be linked to a post on FaceBook. Many departments use this service to post training videos, fire safety messages, or any other form of public announcement (Cawthorne, 2011).

The motives to be in the social media environment are numerous. It is a vital communication tool that reaches the masses in a matter of moments and essentially in real time. A department needs to understand what their motives are for getting into social media,

understand the direction they with to go, and develop a system for one person, or multiple people, to manage and update the web sites in that they are involved.

Research Question 2: How should information be posted on social media sites and how should it be regulated?

Regulating the use of social media falls into two categories. First, sites developed, maintained, managed, and posts added to represent the organization's opinions and views. Second, personal use of these sites has many grey areas to manage or govern. Regardless, employees posting on any Web site are representing their organization. Therefore, policies have been developed by organizations to help regulate how this occurs.

Policies from diverse organizations were reviewed to help answer this research question. Ball State University's policy clearly states the reason for their document:

Social Media are powerful communication tools that have a significant impact on organizational and professional reputations. Because they blur the lines between personal voice and institutional voice, Ball State University has crafted the following policy to help clarify how best to enhance and protect personal and professional reputations when participating in social media ("Ball State University Social Media Policy", 2009, p.1).

It is apparent these organizations felt the need to regulate how social media is used both in and outside of work. Several of the policies and their highlights will be discussed.

Orange County, California developed a policy since it was realized, ". . . that social media can be used to effectively to enhance constituent communications" ("County Social Media Use Policy", 2010, p.1). Orange County has placed the responsibility of governance on the Department Head or designee to determine who is authorized to use social media on behalf of the agency ("Orange County Media Policy", 2010). Clark County, Nevada also determined

Department Heads or their designee is responsible for site content and upkeep (“Social Media Policy”, 2009). The City of Hampton, Virginia, has appointed “city social networking moderators” from each department. These moderators are responsible for information placed on line and to ensure the sites are current (“Social Media Policy”, 2009). The content will be scrutinized and determined to be a benefit to the community and organization.

The policies discuss other issues such as what a citizen can or cannot post. In Clark County, they are cautious to the fact a person may place a link to their personal business (“Social Media Policy”, 2009). Orange County’s IT Department determines what sites are appropriate. There are Web sites that are official county social media sites. The CEO of the IT department governs the site’s content (“Orange County Media Policy”, 2010). The City of Hampton has a section of the policy dedicated to proper blog posts (“Social Media Policy”, 2009). There are many facets to developing a policy and these are just but a few of sections to take into consideration when evaluating the specific needs for one’s community.

Personal use is a difficult subject as many people feel it interferes with first amendment rights (Long, 2011). Several policies govern use while a person is off duty. The Austin Fire Department has developed its policy to govern on-duty and off-duty use. The previous examples cited were a few examples of the policy. When a person is representing an organization, there are certain rules that have to be followed (DeCrane, 2010). Orange County and The City of Hampton define that a person must state it is their own opinion and they are not representing their agency. There are articles posted that help an employee use good judgment when making a post. One article was previously discussed and it listed ten ways to use social media so you do not get fired (Wirth & Wolfberg, 2010). Articles such as these are good information and provide solid guidance for individuals who use social media during their personal time.

Research Question 3: What is the appropriate posting of information on social media sites?

All of the policies reviewed outlined procedures that shall be followed for the content that can be placed on line. Intel took a different approach and used the term, “rules of engagement” to define the company’s directives for using social media. These rules govern items such as be transparent, be judicious, perception is reality, create some excitement, and be a leader (“Intel Social Media Guidelines”, n.d.). This is not a traditional approach but demonstrates accountability for a company that often posts on-line.

Clark County spells out prohibited uses (“Social Media Policy”, 2009) while Orange County calls it “use behavior” (“Orange County Media Policy”, 2010, p. 8). The rules are similar and discuss items such as do not violate HIPPA laws, do not use content that fosters discrimination, no commercial solicitations, and information that violates a person’s privacy. Other areas covered are legal issues, copyright infringement, and being transparent on your post. In other words, declare who you are and your title (“Orange County Media Policy”, 2010). These rules are expansive and should be clearly defined in the policy.

The Austin Fire Department decided to keep their policy simple at to the point. The fire department was pro-active and used rules such as members of the department shall not criticize or ridicule the department. In addition, members shall not:

1. Use writing or expressions that is defamatory, obscene, slanderous or unlawful
2. Tends to interfere with the maintenance of proper discipline and/or
3. Damages or repairs the reputation and competence of the Department or employee

(DeCrane, 2010)

A guide should be developed by the organization as to the content that should be posted on the site. It should be determined the purpose of the site and what message(s) want to be

conveyed to the public. Social media has many diverse uses and it is imperative the organization defines their goal for opening the door into this form of modern communication.

Research Question 4: How should policies be developed to regulate social media use and what items should be included?

When developing a social media policy, it is recommended that the department form a committee to discuss the purpose of entering the social media realm (DeCrane, 2010). Lisa Barone (2009) states, “List to me. Do NOT enter social media until you know what you want to get out of it” (p.2). It is recommended that the team consist of people in positions that have authority to help determine the parameters of posting content. In addition, departments are cautioned to include younger employees as they are the ones who are most familiar with the various sites and their use (Johnson, 2011).

There are several other items that need to be taken into consideration. First, know the target audience you wish to reach and understand the on-line “communities” they are associated with (Barone, 2009). Next, rules of engagement need to be clarified. Examples of these rules are:

- How will this media be integrated into the organization?
- What sites will the department participate in?
- Who will be the voice of the company?
- Who will monitor the sites content?
- What subjects will be off-limits? (Bressler, 2010)

Other items that will need to be discussed are how to protect the department from legal issues, rules to avoid copyright infringement, and ensuring the department, community and organization is being represented in a positive manner (Wirth & Wolfberg, 2010).

Another element is employee use of social media both on and off duty. Westminster Public Information Officer Diana Allen states, “I think trying to regulate it is a useless endeavor. Social media is too big to control – the best you can do is to educate your people” (D. Allen, personal communication, July 29, 2011). Diana’s point is reflected in other documents such as Intel’s rules of engagement. Intel gave its employees guidelines so they could be trained to follow the expectations when representing the company (“Intel Social Media Guidelines”, 2010). Ball State University developed their policy to help clarify and how to best enhance and protect personal and professional reputations while using social media (“Ball State University Social Media Policy”, 2009). Social media is vast topic and there are many avenues for employees to express their opinions and represent their organization. The Austin Fire Department feels that personal conduct can be controlled and the employee can be held accountable if they violate the policy. The department formed a conduct policy as it relates to social media and covers obscene or slanderous postings, language that damages or impairs the efficiency of the department or members, and covers written documents, photos, and videos that are placed on a Web site (DeCrane, 2009). These two forms of policy guide employee conduct and help an organization cover their legal obligations when placing themselves in the virtual world.

Discussion

Social media has become an essential form of communication. There are vast forms that allow a department, business, or organization to deliver important information in a rapid manner and deliver updates in real-time. There are many forms of social media that can be used to distribute this information. FaceBook has become a very popular site worldwide that has over 750 million users (FaceBook, n.d.). This is considered a viral site since people are able to develop their own home page. Friends are invited to join so they can read their content. Friends

of friends can view this content and so on. An organization can develop their page to accomplish this same type of interaction (Baumgartner & Morris, 2010). An organization may have 14,000 friends but can reach over 50,000 people through these connections (McCourt, 2010). Twitter is a site that allows real-time updates to be given. Many agencies are using Twitter to notify the media of events that are occurring in their jurisdiction. The event and location can be disseminated so the media can respond if they chose without interfering with emergency dispatch operations. Twitter can also be used to send out notices of road closures, weather information, or any other important items pertaining to the community. YouTube is a site that offers an agency the means of uploading a video. Agencies are using YouTube to send out public information messages or fire and public safety communications. This is a valuable Web site as it is a free means of visual access to the public. An agency can show a demonstration, give an important fire or medical education seminar, and put the fire service into the homes of the community (Cawthorne, 2011). Deanne Goodman (2011) reflects on the use of Skype. Cal Fire is using this tool as a means to hold a press conference without bringing the media to one central location. This is a tool that can be used for training classes or meetings with an agency. Fire departments have satellite stations and this tool will bring the stations together for face-time communication.

When addressing the first research question, what are the suitable motives to use social media, agencies involved in its use have clearly demonstrated its potential. Departments have realized these vast forms of communication have taken businesses, organizations both private and public, government agencies and other groups and catapulted them into the vast majority of homes. It has also opened the doors to a citizen's place of business, those with a mobile phone with Web access, or other devices such as an iPad. The Web is accessible from just about any place a person is visiting or lives through stationary or mobile devices. This creates a fantastic

opportunity for the fire service to take their message to the Web and deliver it to a broad spectrum of user.

The stakeholders in a community are vast and the departments can tailor their messages to a specific audience or be general in nature. There have been several examples cited that address how departments are successful with their endeavors in the realm of social media. Dan Knight (2011) stated a town of 10,000 residents could be as successful as a town of 30,000 when implementing a social media campaign. He also went on to mention other potential uses for social media:

- Use FaceBook to hold a volunteer recruitment drive
- Receive feedback from the community on an event
- Ask the public to participate in an upcoming ceremony
- Post pictures of events on Flickr
- Monitor Twitter for comments about your agency
- Post video of events
- Use as a form of free advertisement for an event

There countless ideas for utilizing social media. Other items posted can include community education, fire prevention education or safety message, keep the community up-to-date on events, relay road closures, and notify residents of weather emergencies (McCliggott, 2011).

Boston Fire Department has been successful in using social media to send out messages regarding its department. In addition to the successful reminder to “change your batteries in smoke and carbon monoxide detectors” campaign, they also notify residents of heroic acts of firefighters, testing dates to become a firefighter, links to news articles about the department, community outreach programs, and photos (McCourt, 2010). The respondents to the WFD

questionnaire also recognize the potential benefits of entering social media use. There were many reasons given and some of the top were to deliver public relation announcements, post public education bulletins, provide fire prevention and medical tips, post important announcements such as special events, fund raisers, and road closures, inform the community of calls that happened in their city, post pictures and video, and provide a forum for citizens to interact with the fire department. PIO Dian Allen (2011) stated social media should be used to, “engage citizens, personnel, and other stakeholders in WFD activities, promote awareness of safety issues, build camaraderie’s, lend support to worthy causes or just share interesting items with people interested in the fire services industry” (D. Allen, personal communication, July 29, 2011).

Once it is determined an agency would like to engage in the social media concept, it is important to determine what it is they want to be engaged in. The policy will be developed and these stipulations need to be outlined and clearly defined (DeCrane, 2010). Once this occurs, it is next vital to determine who will be the point of contact or the one who posts on these Web sites. If FaceBook is used, it is not critical to have the information immediately posted. If Twitter is used for an event that is happening in real-time, there needs to be a person or persons authorized to send out the tweet. Agencies have used different methods for this process and it often appears to happen under a department head or their designee. The designee tends to be the PIO as they are the face of the organization. If they are not available, there needs to be other people in key positions that have authorization, training, and access to change a post, add a video or photos, submit an immediate tweet, or take other action as necessary (Joyner, 210). Personnel can be trained on each shift to be the representative, an employee in dispatch, or as in the case of the City of Hampton, a social networking moderator (“Social Media Policy”, 2009).

The regulation of the content posted will fall under the designee(s). When the committee is formed to develop the SOG, the items and content the group determines relevant to post needs to be placed in the document. This will serve as a guide for the designee to follow and represent the agency in a positive manner. Personal privacy, copyright laws, HIPPA precautions, and other potential issues that may arise should be addressed. With a well planned SOG, and personnel trained in the motives for posting on these sites, erroneous postings will be diminished. Ultimately, the fire chief will be responsible for the content on these sites. The reputation of the department and organization must always be in the forefront of the designees thought process.

Appropriate posting of material can be a very long list. It will be a dynamic process and each division of a department will have different needs. This process will require excellent communication between the designee(s) and each division manager. A list of potential uses has been mentioned throughout this paper. Therefore, it is important to form a committee with a diverse cross section of the department, different demographics such as age and gender, and those that represent the stakeholders the social media is intended to promote.

Developing policies is another aspect that will be dictated by the practices already instituted in ones own agency. If this is a new concept to a department, it is important to have personnel involved who use social media and understand how far reaching it is and can be. It is also important to understand the various sites and how they are used. YouTube is video based, Twitter is for immediate notification, and FaceBook is to develop viral communities. Others that need to be included are those who have the authority to make a decision and understand the legal aspects of sharing information. This may include a person from the city, county or agency's attorney's office, human resources, EMS division manager, the Information Technology department, other departments that may have a policy instituted, or other internal or external

sources. Reviewing other agencies policies such as County of Orange, Intel, or the City of Hampton give a group a great starting point for developing their own policy. Many organizations in the private and public sectors have developed a social media policy. Many articles and books have been written on the subject and there are many facets to take into consideration and needs to be researched. Numerous authors have stated common sense needs to be used. This approach has failed other agencies since graphic pictures have been posted of car crash victims in Georgia (Glor, 2010) and New York (Slattery, 2011). It is best to define through policy so there will not be any confusion as to what can and cannot be posted. In addition, if a designee is not sure, there must be a safety net put into place to run the content by a person of authority or has the background to make the determination if the content it appropriate.

Recommendations

Social media has become a primary form of communication in today's society. It has given people the opportunity to receive news, data, and information as it happens. In prior years, a person would have to wait until the morning, noon, or evening news, or the wait for the newspaper the next day to receive details of events. In order for communities to schedule events, they would have to send out a special letter, publish a flyer, send out a mailer, or hope people would see a poster of the event at a local community center. Social media is available to the vast majority of people in this country and through a computer, mobile phone, or tablet. Internet World Stats estimates 78% of the United States population uses the Internet ("Internet World Stats", 2010). With the popularity of FaceBook, Twitter, YouTube, and other sites, it is recommended that the WFD become an active participant in using social media.

Through this research, it is evident there are numerous and vast motives for entering into the social media environment. There have been many examples discussed such as developing

public relations, posting event notices, discussing high interest events, posting fire and medical education messages, and displaying pictures and videos of events, educational topics, or informational items. This list can be expanded and would serve the WFD in its effort to expand community outreach. With FaceBook, the WFD has developed a page but has not worked to expand its network and improve the viral aspect of the site. Developing friends and concentrating on target audiences in the community can help deliver the department's message. Forums and discussions can be started and monitored to receive feedback and help the community feel that they are involved in department. Twitter can be used to notify the metro-area media of events that are happening in Westminster as they unfold. Messages regarding road closures, severe weather that is occurring, and snow closings can be quickly disseminated to the public. Finally, there are sites such as YouTube or Flickr that can be used to post video of events that occurred in the city, competitions the department has participated in, and send out public service announcements. The content on these sites can be linked to a specific FaceBook post. These forms of communication offer various methods to expand the WFD into the community. Through careful planning and SOG development, these communication mediums will serve the citizens well.

The WFD has made an effort to enter the world of social media but has just scratched the surface. The problem is the WFD does not have a policy in place to utilize social media and set policy for members to be successful in its use. This research has provided several solutions and ideas to set the path in motion to formulate a SOG that will guide the use of these various communication mediums. It is recommended that the staff of the WFD administrative staff meet to discuss options to become involved in social media use. It is recommended that a committee is formed to review the presented research and determine the direction the department would like

to take in delivering their message to the community. Most forms of social media need to be considered and direction and guidance needs to be formally outlined for the content that is going to be posted. This is a far reaching task and members from all divisions need to be included in these discussions to ensure their specific needs are met. This process will take some time but it is necessary to have a plan in place before content is posted. Lisa Barone (2009) reminds organizations that it is essential to know what they want to get out of it before they enter the world of social media.

Once a plan is established, a formal SOG should be developed. This guideline should outline the use of social media, types of content that could be placed on-line, who will monitor the Web sites, and who will be authorized to place information on the sites. Other issues should be discussed such as legal, HIPPA, and copyright laws to educate the department employees on using caution when posting content. It is important for the department to cover their basis as there is always the human factor when placing items on line. This guideline should also cover the personal use social media. There are two areas that need to be covered. First, when an employee is positing comments in relation to the organization, or representing themselves as a member of the organization, guidelines and educational topics need to be clearly defined and discussed. The research has shown the majority of policies cover employee use. There is controversy as to the employee's rights to express their views but a defined stance leaves less chance for trouble when posting information. Second, Steve Wirth and Doug Wolfberg (2010) offer ten rules to help employees keep out of trouble when using social media. The Austin Fire Department takes a more direct approach and defines rules for employees when they post comments on personal accounts (DeCrane, 2010). Intel decided to issue Rules of Engagement and placed the responsibility and accountability on the employee ("Intel Social Media

Guidelines”, 2010). These varied approaches offer guidance to the employee and the committee will need to determine what is best for the organization. The recommendation from this research reveals Austin Fire Department sets clear policy that does not leave any guesswork in the expectations of the organization. These clear rules protect the reputation of the organization and personnel and keep from employees stating they had not received defined guidelines for social media use.

Social media is a valuable tool to any organization and is a cost effective way to reach out to the community. It creates connections and allows communication to happen (Wren, 2010). There are many acceptable avenues of communication and choosing the best ones to deliver the department’s message and intent require a collaborative effort throughout the department. Social media is broad and any person can become a spokesperson for the organization. Through careful planning of the agency, determine the varied use, who will govern it, developing a policy to outlines its use, will ensure it is used in a professional manner and protect the agency’s reputation. Entering this world will allow a network to form and a virtual community to take form. This will permit the public to feel they are part of the organization and can receive information on events as they occur. Social media is a large part of society and capitalizing on its application is essential for growth, awareness, and achieving the goal for greater community outreach.

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Appendix A

Fire Department Questionnaire Parameters

Questionnaire Focus: A questionnaire was sent to a cross-section of Westminster Fire Department employees to determine their view on the use of social media on a professional and personal basis. However, this is from a viewpoint of representing the department in both applications. In addition, the group was asked how policy should be formed and what content should be included in the guideline.

Target Audience: A cross section of fire department personnel was used to answer this questionnaire. Two personnel from each rank were sent questionnaires: firefighter, paramedic, engineer, lieutenant, captain, battalion chief and the Public Information Officer.

Timeline: The questionnaire was sent to the group on June 1, 2011 and a deadline to have them completed and returned was July 1, 2011.

Dissemination Method: The questionnaires were sent through electronic mail with a read receipt attached.

Collection Method: The participants were asked to send the results back through electronic mail.

Appendix B

Questionnaire for the Westminster Fire Department

Research is being conducted on the use of social media within the Westminster Fire Department. There is consideration to develop a policy and this study will help determine how it is formed. Please answer the following questions and send back to me by the end of the week. Your participation is appreciated and will help guide the Department in this medium.

1. What are the suitable motives for the WFD to use social media?
2. How should information be posted on social media sites and how should it be regulated?
3. What is the appropriate posting of information on social media sites?
4. How should policies be developed to regulate social media use?
5. Should posting work related items (comments, photos, video) on personal pages such as FaceBook, be regulated through policy?

Appendix C

Overall Questionnaire Results

Research is being conducted on the use of social media within the Westminster Fire Department. There is consideration to develop a policy and this study will help determine how it is formed. Please answer the following questions and send back to me by the end of the week. Your participation is appreciated and will help guide the Department in this medium.

1. What are the suitable motives for the WFD to use social media?

- Public Relations
- Pertinent information to the citizens and organization's employees
- Cost effective way to increase communications
- Public education
- Fire Prevention
- Fire Prevention Education
- Road Closures
- Get information out the public in a quick manner
- Promote department functions
- Same motives as sending out a press release
- Notify the public of events – fund raising, high profile/interest calls, personal accomplishments, or other department related announcements
- Advertising tool
- Build relationships with external agencies
- Collaborative efforts with the citizens and business community
- Make it an educational site - suitable questions and answers
- Calendar of events
- Post fire works regulations and fire works patrol
- Discuss general operations – call load
- Special team information such as deployment (Georgia)

“To engage citizens, personnel, and other stakeholders in WFD activities, promote awareness of safety issues, build camaraderie, lend support to worthy causes or just share interesting items with people interested in the fire services industry.” (Diana Allen)

2. How should information be posted on social media sites and how should it be regulated?

- Dynamic since Web sites are changing. A PR group should be formed
- PIO or PEO
- Through one source or a few other designated personnel
- Identify the poster – be transparent
- State that it is their own opinion - not representing the organizations views
- Authorized personnel under the guidance of the Public Information Officer
- Develop a Standard Operating Guideline

- The information needs to be positive and informative – not useless
- Department news
- Department events
- Everyone has an opinion – should be in-line with core values
- Guidelines discussing acceptable content, purpose of use, and not violating city and department policy
- Guidelines that discuss personal use representing the city and organization.

“I think trying to regulate it is a useless endeavor. Social media is too big to control – the best you can do is to educate your people.” (Diana Allen)

3. What is the appropriate posting of information on social media sites?

- Rules and regulations for citizens such as no grills on decks, open fires
- Special events
- Pertinent links
- Postings should be open to anyone on any mainstream site with a good reputation
- Use good judgment when posting
- Only information that does not violate personal privacy or HIPPA laws
- Training videos that could benefit others
- Emergency preparedness – tornadoes, hailstorm, snowstorm information
- Public education – CPR, car seat inspections
- Numerous PR events

4. How should policies be developed to regulate social media use?

- The officer should be in charge of screening and regulating sites
- Fall in line with City rules and regulations
- Keep in min the City’s mission statement and values (SPIRIT)
- Clarify the organizational goals
- Make sure people know the risks.
- Cite examples:
 - It’s stupid to rant on FaceBook about your boss and hurtful to your career.
 - Posting or allowing others to post photos of you doing illegal/distasteful things is unwise.
 - Posting a photo of response to a car accident and reminding people to wear seatbelts is usually a good thing as long as HIPAA is honored, etc.
- Utilize the SOG committee to help develop the policy
- Use a work group or committee comprised of a cross-section of personnel
- Video and photo policy needs to be developed
- Educate employees on risk and potential consequences of posting work related items
- Make sure it is consistent with any other city policy

5. Should posting work related items (comments, photos, video) on personal pages such as FaceBook, be regulated through policy?

- Strict rules should be formed regarding HIPPA violations
- Other information regarding personal use should be unregulated
- Work is a large part of most people's lives and asking them never to refer to it is unrealistic.
- However, you can have policies that explain the risks and clarify your code of conduct.
 - Does it reflect badly on the department?
 - Could it be risky because of legal or insurance issues?
 - Is it hurtful to another agency or person?
 - Is it hurtful to your career?
- I think the fire department has a number of opportunities to share interesting anecdotes, safety education messages, humorous tidbits and awareness of serious topics.
- Yes! Develop expectations and rules then train the employee group.
- Slanderous comments or personal attacks should not be tolerated
People posting need to use discretion. Although, give guidance and rules.